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U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
USCIRF'S "POLICY FOCUS ON SUDAN"  
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Speakers:

MICHAEL CROMARTIE,

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION  
ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

REPRESENTATIVE NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

REPRESENTATIVE FRANK WOLF (R-VA)

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OTHERS

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MR. CROMARTIE: Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, please.

Good morning, welcome. My name is Michael Cromartie. I'm the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

We are joined today by the vice chair, Felice Gaer, and by my fellow commissioner, Father Ricardo Ramirez, Bishop - I'm sorry - Bishop. I'm sorry, Bishop.

Bishop Ramirez traveled with me to Sudan earlier this year, and we're joined this morning by distinguished members of Congress, which we're grateful they came out of their busy schedules. We have -- House minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, is here; Congressman Frank Wolf.

I'd also like to recognize Rev. Fauntroy. Thank you for coming, sir. Good to have you here.

We're also joined by representatives from nongovernmental organizations that have worked very hard on this issue. Faith McDonald is here from the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Faith, thank you for coming.

Also, Thomas Stenson (ph) is here from the International Crisis Group. Thank you, Tom.

This January we visited Sudan to assess religious freedom conditions and the implementation of the peace agreement, and members of the commission delegation traveled to Khartoum and Cuba and the Nuba Mountains, meeting with government leaders, civil society leaders, religious leaders, ordinary Sudanese including those tragically displaced by the conflict.

And it will not come as a surprise to you to know that the peace in Sudan right now is very fragile. There are serious problems with implementing the peace accord and the revenue sharing agreements that ended the North-South civil war; and the continuing genocide in Darfur raises question about the commitment to peace of some of those who continue to be in positions of power in Khartoum.

There is an urgent need to develop an infrastructure in the war-devastated south and to address the needs of Sudan's millions of internally displaced persons and refugees that need - and their need to compete for scarce donor resources.

Now we concluded that securing the peace requires sustained U.S. resources, and attention, to encourage compliance with the peace agreement; to address the ongoing grave human rights abuses in Darfur and elsewhere; and to facilitate the voluntary return of those who have been displaced by war.

Now after the members of Congress and our other guests speak, we will share with you in greater detail the recommendations by the commission, and our conclusion for U.S. foreign policy toward Sudan, which are contained in the report. Our Sudan report is right outside here, and we are releasing it today.

Now I understand the time constraints that the members of Congress have, so I'd like to leave time now for their comments and their remarks.

Thank you, Representative Pelosi.

REP. NANCY PELOSI (D-CA): Well, thank you very much.

Thank you, Chairman Cromartie, and thank you to the members of the commission for this very important report that comes again at a very crucial time.

I'm honored to be here with our former colleague, Congressman Fauntroy, and it's always, always a privilege when Frank Wolf visits our office. Nobody in Congress is more - is more relentless, more effective, more of a champion for human rights and for religious freedom in the world.

(Applause.)

I learned a lot about what I know about this event from Frank Wolf and the result of his many visits there along with Chris Smith from time to time. When we went there a couple of weeks ago, we went to Darfur, we went to the camps, we saw the children, we heard of relatives burned, fathers killed, mothers raped, children kidnapped.

We saw the children there living in situations which were oppressive heat without shade, without adequate clothing, without any prospects for something

better.

We wanted to bring them all home with us, but of course that would not have been right. They wanted to go home to their homes, not to any Westernized existence. So we brought you their pictures. You see in some of the younger ones some spirit still; some of the older children, their eyes very haunting. These children have seen too much in their young lives.

I'm just afraid that if we don't act soon on Darfur that these children may not survive the heat, the disease, the starvation and the violence in the region. They're adorable. Like all children throughout the world, they just want to be children, and yet they're caught up in this awful political situation there.

I think it's important to note that when we left there we went to Khartoum and when we visited the Vice President Taha there, he told us that we had not seen what we just saw. He denied what we saw with our very eyes only earlier -- hours earlier that day.

He asked us: Why are Americans so interested in what goes on in Sudan? We know you are a free-thinking people, but sometimes your free-thinking does not create an understanding of the facts in our country -- the facts in his country.

We told him that genocide is not an internal affair; it is a concern to the entire world. And then upon our - and we all must rise to that challenge. Too often we have said, never again, only to have it happen again.

As you know some of what is going on in the Sudan, whether in the eastern part is about some religious differences; in the Western part, mostly all Muslims, some Sharia, some not; farmers, nomads, Africans, Arabs. There are so many, so many differences. But all of it in need of stopping the violence, bringing people to the table for peace, and getting humanitarian assistance to the people in need, without kidnapping the humanitarian workers or diverting their convoys.

We came back, we met with - and we will be joined by Congressman Donald Payen, who was on our trip. We came back, with met with Kofi Annan to say, what is it that we can do; this must stop immediately. And we met with the president, and we look forward to working with him in a bipartisan way to stop what is happening in the Sudan.

And so this report that you are putting forth today is timely in many respects. Not only in the Sudan, but what's happening in Afghanistan. The religious freedom of all citizens in the world must be a priority for us as is stopping genocide.

From Abdul Rahman in Afghanistan, to Tibetan nuns -- (unintelligible) - probably I've mispronounced -- and to the rights of those in Sudan who practice their chosen religion freely, the United States must make religious freedom a key component of our foreign policy.

Frank and I have been working on these issues for a very long time. It is frustrating to us when, for example in Afghanistan, much is made about that case. It's a very important case. We must put all the emphasis on it that we did. And with that exposure, with that light shining brightly on it, Abdul Rahman was free.

But thousands and thousands and thousands of people in Chinese prisons in Tibet and other places in the world are persecuted for what they believe. How do you change what you believe? Persecuted for what they believe, and as well we must speak about it, and shine the bright light of freedom on all cases of violations of religious freedom. We must never forget, we must never forget all of those who because of their beliefs, their convictions, their religious life, their soul, that they are being persecuted.

So I wanted to commend the commission, you, Mr. Chairman, to all the members of the commission, and to my friend, Mr. Wolf, who has again - those who believe, those who are persecuted for their beliefs, anyone who cares about them knows of no bigger champion, greater champion, than Congressman Frank Wolf.

(Applause.)

REP. FRANK R. WOLF (R-VA): Thank you very much, Leader Pelosi. And I want to - Nancy has done more when these issues come up, it'll be Pelosi, Lantos and Smith. And you hear it over and over.

And Leader Pelosi was also responsible for the commission coming into existence which enabled this report to take place. And from the students in Tianamen when you were arrested if I recall - (laughter) -- whether it was standing up for the oppressed, and taking the time now to go to Darfur and Sudan, I personally want to thank you very much because this is a bipartisan issue across the aisle.

What do you do about it? I know there's a great frustration. My own personal feeling now - Secretary Rice testified before our committee last week - is that we have to go back and do something bolder.

I know the president cares very, very deeply. I commend Undersecretary Zoellick. He's been there four times. God bless him for taking the time.

But I think it has to be treated with more passion than an analytical issue of getting this group to table. And to say that when you're trying to get two sides to the table, they both are equal, it's not the case now. As Nancy told you, it's not equal with regard to what's taking place with these young kids that Leader Pelosi saw, and then the power of the government in Khartoum.

So I believe now - I've searched, and when a debate came up the supplemental, of all the things, the thing that I think, all the things that are taking place -- and I appreciate Nancy's involved in it -- I think we have to go back to a very aggressive policy, and appoint a special envoy who cares - (applause) - who really cares not as an analytical issue, not in bringing sides, but in really, with passion, somebody who understands the issue, somebody who Secretary Rice has total and complete confidence in, somebody who President Bush has total and complete confidence in, who really could be that person to take this on the same way that former Senator Danforth took it on.

He did a great job of bringing the North-South thing. So I really believe that's what we have to do.

And boy, there are a lot of people who could do that. But coming over, and thinking about it the last couple of days, the person that I think could probably bring this thing - and who cares deeply, and Nancy knows him very well - is former congressman Tony Hall.

Tony is now leaving his ambassadorship in Rome. He reaches across the aisle, is somebody that President Bush has confidence in, he was appointed; somebody that Nancy Pelosi would have confidence in because she served with him; somebody that the Congress will be - somebody who cares about these issues with passion, but somebody who can take this time on full-time because you cannot allow the genocide to continue to take place and think it's just like bringing two sides together and resolve it.

If this is not resolved, then the North-South agreement with fall apart. So I appreciate the commission's report. I will read it all. And I want to again thank Nancy publicly for taking the time. I mean, when you're the leader time is critical, and to take that time and to go and do all that she's done -- so Nancy, thank you very, very much.

(Applause.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, Congressman. I know you might - you need to leave.

REP. PELOSI: I have to excuse myself. But I wanted to associate myself with what Frank has called for, a special envoy. His choice is an excellent one. It's absolutely essential that we have someone who has the ear of the president. The president is very interested and involved in this issue; we have that opportunity.

So I know that Mr. Payne supports that as well because it's in his Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, which we all support. Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you so much. Thank you for coming.

Well, for those of you who are not familiar with the commission -- and I assume that your being here, you do know something about the commission. But if you don't, you need to know that the commission is an independent bipartisan federal government advisory body which was created by Congress in 1998 to monitor violations of religious freedom worldwide, and recommend policies to Congress and to the secretary of State, and to the president of the United States, to advance that freedom.

We are here to discuss our new report on Sudan which is being released to the public today, and copies are available, again, as I said on the table right outside the door here. Or you can also get it on our website, which is - if you have your pen in hand - [www.uscifr.gov](http://www.uscifr.gov) - [uscifr.gov](http://uscifr.gov).

Sudan was one of the first countries on which the commission focused its attention, and the commission found religion to be a major factor in Sudan's North-South civil war in which 2 million people were killed and 4 million people were displaced.

In January, 2005, the North-South civil war formally ended with the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement, often referred to as the CPA, between the authorities in Khartoum, and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement.

A year later Bishop Ramirez and I traveled to Sudan to assess the progress in implementing the CPA. And we met with, as I said earlier, government officials and civil society leaders and religious leaders to discuss the CPA.

What did we find? Well we actually found some dramatic changes, and notably we found that peace between the north and the south, which is a welcome change from over two decades of warfare; however, we found that peace is fragile, and it does not extend throughout the country, notably to the western region of Darfur.

We also found a new government of national unity in Khartoum, and we found a new interim national constitution which commits the Sudanese authority to international human rights standards, with future democratic elections, and to a referendum to determine the future of the south.

However, while those are encouraging signs, we also found some serious problems. We found that there needs to be - we found that there are significant delays, significant delays and shortcomings in the CPA's implementation.

Institutions called for in the CPA not yet been established, and are now only beginning to function, or have yet to prove their worth.

We found that the sharing of Sudan's oil revenues lacks transparency and may not be implemented fully.

The CPA's arrangement for protection of human rights, including religious freedom, were vulnerable to erosion and manipulation because of Sudan's weaknesses in the areas of law, in the rule of law and press freedom and democratic accountability.

We also found that key levers of power remain in the hands of those who were responsible for the massive human rights abuses, both during the North-South civil war, and now in Darfur.



And then we found most tragically -- we note in the report the continuing genocide in Darfur which threatens the peace of the north and the south throughout Sudan.

So based on these findings the commission concluded that, first of all, number one, that sustained close engagement by the U.S. government will be necessary, as both the congressman and woman said just now; sustained engagement by the U.S. will be necessary to ensure compliance with the CPA, particularly on its human rights provision.

The United States has a direct role in this as a member of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission. And the U.S. Embassy, we found, needs more resources -- needs more resources to advance the scope.

Second, continued U.S. leadership and resolve and resources are needed to ensure that institutional development of the south brings prosperity and progress to that war-devastated region; and to ensure that millions of Sudanese refugees and internally displaced persons return home in safety and resettled elsewhere.

And we found this very movingly, when we visited IDP camps where the people there just want to go home so bad. They just kept saying, over and over, we want to return. We want to return.

And third, we concluded that urgent efforts are needed to stop the killing in Darfur. While international attention and resources must be devoted to better address - to address better the implementation of the CPA.

Now, you may have seen in The New York Times recently, in the March 20 issue, this great advertisement in The New York Times. In this ad it says - thank you - in this special advertising segment, it begins with, and the headline you'll see - the peace dividend: prosperity could lie ahead after years of conflict. Prosperity could lie ahead after years of conflict.

Well, we agree with that; prosperity is possible for Sudan. But only if, number one, the CPA is implemented fully. Only if - prosperity will be possible only if the CPA is implemented fully.

Number two, only if human rights are protected - only if human rights are protected - will prosperity thrive.

And number three, if Sudan's oil wealth is used for the benefit of all Sudanese and not monopolized by a small minority in the capital who maintain themselves in power by intimidation and violence, even to the extent of genocide - yes, genocide right now in Darfur.

So our report - I call attention again to our report, which contains many specific recommendations on what the United States government can do, and should be doing, to help Sudan achieve these goals. And so I urge you to read those recommendations.

Now let me now turn the podium over to my fellow commissioner and my fellow traveler to Sudan, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez.

BISHOP RAMIREZ: Thank you, Michael, and good morning.

My name is Ricardo Ramirez. If you want to practice rolling your R's, say my name several times. (Laughter.)

I'm a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and I am the bishop of the diocese of Las Cruces in New Mexico.

I was particularly struck by the human dimension of the situation in Sudan. Over four million people were uprooted by the North-South war, and two million more have been displaced by the genocide in Darfur. Very few people have been able to return home.

A personal high point of the trip to Sudan was our visit to Jebel Uliya (ph), a camp for internally displaced persons, a short drive outside of Khartoum. I was moved by their hardships, what I saw there, and coupled by the courage and fortitude displayed by the people that I met.

I was also moved by the courage of religious leaders, religious - of the religious community that I met in Khartoum, and by all those who speak up a respect for human rights and human dignity.

We found the following. Although religious freedom conditions in the south, the Nuba Mountains and other formerly contested areas, have significantly improved since the signing of the CPA, in the government controlled areas of the north, the religious freedom and other human rights protections agreed to in the CPA have not yet resulted in significant change in practice.

The legal penalty of death for apostasy from Islam remains the law of the land. I'd like to talk a little bit about that.

While it is possible, it is within their legal framework to convert from a religion, any other religion, to Islam is allowed; but for a Muslim to convert to any other religion is not allowed. If it does happen, then those people will have to leave the country for fear of reprisal or for fear of the loss of their own lives.

Christians and followers of traditional African religions in the north are not exempt from Sharia Islamic law. As has been the case for decades, no permits for new church construction have been granted. This has been going on for more than 20 years that no permission has been given.

At times it seems that the property is taken away, and that there is no reimbursement for that. This was a cardinal's comment. He said, it's bad enough that they take away property from us at times, but then we are not reimbursed for the value of that property.

The government supervises and controls most of the Muslim religious institutions in order to favor a militant interpretation of Islam that promotes intolerance and undermines human rights of both Muslims and non-Muslims including women.

The activities of humanitarian organizations are subject to harassment and interference by security forces. All refugees and internally displaced persons with whom we spoke expressed a strong desire to return home to contribute to rebuilding the country. U.S. Rep. Pelosi was correct: they want to go home, and they can't go home. Some of them have been in camps for over 10 years.

However, the numbers of potential returnees are so great and the infrastructure in the south so lacking that the return effort will necessarily be massive. The U.S. must find an appropriate response.

And it is - the logistics of returning is pretty devastating. There is no Southwest Airlines between the north and the south -- (laughter) -- on any date that's regular or otherwise. There's no trains, there's no Amtrak, nothing like that. There's no Greyhound buses, nothing to go. It will take weeks, sometimes perhaps even months, to go by barge and by walking and who knows how else. But it's just very difficult for them to return home, even if they were - if the infrastructure and everything else was okay. Dwindling resources such as food and medical services are going to the IDP camps around Khartoum and to the refugee camps in neighboring countries such as Kenya.

Basically, finally, the commission has concluded, Sudan should continue to be designated a country of particular concern. Now that's the black list, so to speak, that we recommend to the State Department. Then the State Department will list people as a country of particular concern for egregious violations of religious freedom. So we recommend that Sudan continue to be placed on that list, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

Sanctions should remain until particularly severe religious freedom violations are ended throughout Sudan, and the genocide ends in Darfur. That said, sanctions should not preclude the participation of the government of southern Sudan in U.S.-funded development projects, U.S. assistance programs to advance implementation of the CPA or educational exchanges. I'm particularly interested in that, that we shouldn't have sanctions for educational exchanges. Those people must rebuild their country, and they must rebuild much of it by themselves. And if they don't have the people prepared to do it, and trained and educated, they won't be able to do it by themselves.

So they must be trained. My diocese has New Mexico State University, known for its agricultural and engineering schools. And I would love to see people from the Sudan come and study there to prepare to rebuild their devastated country.

The U.S. government should develop a strategy and fund specific programs to promote implementation of the CPA's human rights and religious freedom provisions. The U.S. government should appoint a high level special representative or coordinator. Mr. Frank Wolf said an envoy, a special envoy. It doesn't matter what we call him, as long as that person is there.

And not only for the entire thing, but especially - with a special interest for Sudanese refugees in IDPs, to ensure that U.S. funds and influence are used effectively; to assist their timely and voluntary (esteem ?) or resettlement.

Finally I encourage all of you to consider carefully the commission's recommendations, and recognize the need for continued U.S. leadership in building a just peace in Sudan, sustained by respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic institutions.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you very much.

I'd like to recognize Shanara Rome (ph), is here, glad you could come. Thank you for coming. I'm not going to call on you; I just wanted to recognize you. Thank you for the Human Rights Watch.

Congressman Payne, thank you for joining us, sir.

REP. DONALD M. PAYNE (D-NJ): Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Can we hear from you now?

REP. PAYNE: Oh, are you going to call on me?

MR. CROMARTIE: I'm calling on you right now.

(Laughter.)

REP. PAYNE: Thank you very much.

Just let me say how pleased I am to see so many people here, because as you know, this is one of the most egregious situations anywhere in the world today. And I think that the world has taken too long to really have a level of indignation.

Many of us here have, but it's something that we're appealing continually to the press and media, which really carries a very big responsibility, and we have not yet seen the level of exposure from - we've had some fantastic people. If it wasn't for them, we would still - many people would still be in the dark. But I think that much more must be done by the press.

Let me just thank the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedoms for its longstanding and continuous work in Sudan. And like I said, if it wasn't for organizations like yours, we'd certainly also be further behind.

The commission's efforts towards a lasting resolution of the 21-year-old North-South conflict is certainly commendable, and the leadership of your organization, I commend you again. The commission's two-week visit in January to Khartoum, we stopped in Sudan and Kenya, and its subsequent report, "Policy Focus on Sudan," is critical in its timing and its concentration on the status of religious freedom in the north and the south, and the peace process, is extremely timely at this time because I fear that the comprehensive peace agreement, signed as you know in January of last year, is in danger of failing; because the ruling National Congress Party in Khartoum, as we know formerly the NIF party, the National Islamic Front, is not acting in good faith in my opinion to implement the CPA's provisions. Religious freedom, wealth sharing, and power sharing - these agreements are simply not being fully implemented by the government of Khartoum in a timely fashion. So I feel that we must engage in the protection for human rights as we call for it, and as the CPA says should be implemented.

We feel that what is happening in parts of Sudan -- whether it's in Darfur, whether it's in southern Sudan, whether it's in the Nuba Mountains, whether it's in the east -- where we have to really keep our eyes on that or we're going to see an unraveling there, or in the north.

I sent a letter to President Bush last month which, we were able to get 80 other members to sign - 80 other members of Congress - saying that we have extreme concerns about the deteriorating situation in Sudan; not just because of Darfur, but also in terms of the CPA, and the worsening situation in the east.

We all know that the Darfur conflict now has spilled into Chad. We're seeing some remnants of that going into Niger. The whole region now is

going to be at risk if this continues.

The northern Uganda Lord's Resistance Army is having an impact on the Sudan, and so this whole region, because the government in Khartoum is not acting in a responsible manner, we're seeing the consequences.

Since Congress and the administration declared genocide in mid - in late 2004, there has been, as we know, estimates from the beginning of conflict to now of up to 400,000 people dead, and 2.5 million people have been displaced. Over 3 million almost, which is half of the population of Darfur, depend on food assistance. And one day we're going to pass the request and perhaps governments are going to say, we don't have any money today.

And what will happen then -- as we see continued crisis around the globe, but in particular, in this region. Three million people a day is quite - in this one region - is enormous. And I think that the government of Sudan prefers to have other people take care of its people, especially those that they don't care about. And so there is no reason, no incentive, for them to end it. As a matter of fact, it's an advantage to keep things the way they are.

Over the last several months conditions in Darfur have deteriorated. Government-sponsored Janjaweed have continued the killing, raping, terrorizing of citizens, not only in Sudan, but have gone across the border into Chad. That is what is so scary.

Although AUMIS has done a great job in its limited mandate, 7,000 troops for a region the size of Texas is certainly inadequate; we know that; and that the security situation continues to worsen on the ground.

The number one issue people said: security, period. That's what they want. That's what they need first of all. And it is not being provided.

AU personnel themselves have become part of targets of the violence and tragically a number of them have been killed.

As the situation deteriorates, support is growing for a U.N. peacekeeping force with a Chapter Seven mandate. We really need to get it clear, we have the administration to come out with a clear picture. Are we for a

blue helmeted -- not partly blue, maybe green but somewhat blue - (laughter) - under AU but not according to - you have to have it clear. And we have to perhaps even have it in a Chapter Seven mandate so that we can protect the civilians from the continued violence.

In January the AU's peace and security council expressed support in principle to the transition from AIMUS to U.N. Once we have to - you know, this is in principle. I always question what in principle means. We will have an agreement in principle. We need an agreement period. Leave "in principle;" we can deal with the principles later. But we need an agreement, so we know where we stand because as you know it takes four or five months at least to be able to gather a force. You have to go to countries; you make to make requests; they have to see what they have available. And so if you don't have a clear mandate at this time your time is going further and further away.

I have serious concerns about the culture of impunity in Khartoum, of what's going on. Even in the face of four Security Council resolutions which seek to determine what atrocities have been carried out, and punishment for those who were responsible for these heinous acts of genocide, no individuals to date have yet been held responsible, and we have to somehow hold those who are responsible.

Charles Taylor must be held responsible, and as you know, now he's been apprehended, temporarily. Now we have to make sure that he gets to the court. But we have to show examples of people who violate human rights.

And so as I conclude, let me just say we have to be sure that the CPA - revenue sharing. And I met with the head of the federal bank of southern Sudan about three weeks ago in Nairobi, and to that date, none of the oil revenues had been shared. Number one, it's difficult to get a clear accounting of how much revenue they bring in in the first place. It could be what they call cooking the books, double booking.

But then on top of that, they are not talking about internal consumption. They say, well, we'll just talk about exports.

Well, you are starting out already with trying to be - to deceive. And so we have to - must make sure that while the CPA has yielded some success, the U.S. must not let up on pressure on the National Congress Party to fully implement all of its elements.

It is very disturbing that many of the key commissions to be established are



not functioning. Additionally President Bashir must accept and implement the findings of the Abaye (ph) commission. Government troops must be withdrawn from southern Sudan on schedule, if they have not. Joint integrated units must be established. Further, the CPA must be successful that the oil revenues are being shared properly. The CPA is not only a negotiated agreement between the north and the south; it also serves as a model for peace for all Sudan.

Without consistent and unified intensive pressure on the government in Khartoum to implement the CPA, end the genocide in Darfur and seriously negotiate a peace agreement in eastern Sudan, we will witness more bloodshed and genocide and violence throughout the country.

Let's not forget, this is the same country that harbored Osama bin Laden for five years. You know, (the guys ?) who the administration flew here for discussions with the same one who was in charge of their apparatus for their internal security when Osama bin Laden had refuge there. So leopards really don't change their spots.

We need to take, I think, with a grain of salt their agreement to work with us on the war on terror. While they are creating terror on their own people, I question whether they're concerned about our safety.

But we will continue to keep - because I also agree with someone who mentioned a special envoy. We need a special envoy. This administration needs to - you know, I expressed -- we need a special - we need someone like - of the Danforth status to be the special envoy responsible for what is going on in Sudan.

So once again I really appreciate the great work that you have done. Without what you have done, we would not be where we are.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, sir.

Now we have some guests here who worked very hard on this issue, and I think they may well have come prepared with some remarks. Am I right about that?

And our first person Jamera Rone from Human Rights Watch. We'd like to hear from you.

JAMERA RONE: Thank you very much for inviting me.

I'm Jamara Rone from Human Rights Watch, and I appreciate the remarks that everyone else has made, and I do appreciate the continuing work that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is doing on Sudan, and in particular, keeping the focus on the rights of southerners, particularly in Khartoum, which remains a very, very troubled situation even after the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement.

We too have made some of the same findings, and noted a lot of the same defects with regard to the implementation, and the goodwill of the National Congress Party to really live up to and comply with the spirit of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; not just the form of it.

So I'd like to commend again the work of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on that.

On Darfur, Human Rights Watch's overarching goal is the reversal of ethnic cleansing, and there are two elements to that: one is accountability; and the other is protection. With regard to accountability, the Security Council has for the first time referred the situation in Darfur - of all the situations in the world, it's the first referral that it's made to the International Criminal Court.

That is a landmark, and now it's up to the International Criminal Court to completely its investigation.

The Sudan government does not want to cooperate with it. Some Security Council action will probably be necessary in order to -- you know, to encourage or require them to allow free access to the international criminal courts' investigators to Darfur. They have already had a lot of access to Chad, but that isn't the end of it.

The International Criminal Court is only going to do a small - a handful of prosecutions of the very top leaders, so there are a lot of people that need to be prosecuted under this current government in Sudan, and it's very unlikely - it is impossible, actually - that these people will ever face justice.

And without some kind of accountability, it's unlikely that the situation in Darfur can ever be reversed. The ethnic cleansing that's been going on, the crimes against humanity that have been going on are continuing because there is a complete state of impunity. The government is protecting the Janjaweed militias who are responsible, with the government, for the majority of crime.

And as long as they're getting away with murder and looting and rape, they will continue to murder, loot and rape, unfortunately, as the means to keep people from going back to their own land and reclaiming it and taking up farming and other productive activities again.

There are two million people who are now totally displaced from their land.

The other issue which is tied up with accountability is protection. Protection of civilians is worse in Darfur than almost any other situation - I believe than any other situation of internally displaced in the entire world.

They are prey to attack from all sides. The displaced are basically penned in to the internally displaced camps. If they go out they continue to be attacked, women and girls particularly raped, and subjected to sexual abuse if they go outside of the camps. This is all means of keeping them from reclaiming their land.

The protection should have been afforded by the African Union. The African Union forces have done as much as they could with their weapons and their inadequate supplies of communication equipment, the fact that they are very new as a trained force; that they have never operated together before; that there are a lot of glitches in their system that still have to be worked out. There are all these problems with the African Union.

They have been making good progress, but unfortunately, the situation has become so much worse than they ever bargained for when they first undertook this mandate of civilian protection in 2004.

So they have agreed that it - that the U.N. should be taking over. And I think the U.N. is not going to be the be-all and end-all of civilian protection, but it will be much better.

Now the Sudan government is fighting the U.N. peacekeeping operations in Darfur tooth and nail. And one of the reasons - we keep hearing this from Khartoum - one of the reasons is, they are afraid that the U.N. troops will come and arrest them if the International Criminal Court ever issues arrest warrants.

So their main concern is survival in power and protection of themselves from prosecution, even though there have been no arrest warrants issued or anything.

So that is one of the primary motives for rejecting U.N. protection for Sudanese civilians that they are not interested in protecting, because keeping them pinned down and keeping them from returning to their farms is part of their grand counterinsurgency strategy to defeat the rebels by keeping everyone who is ethnically related to the rebels from moving about in the countryside.

So I thank you very much for this opportunity to address you today. And everything that I have said and more is on our website, [hrw.org](http://hrw.org), and we put out many different reports on Darfur as well as on the south. Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you. Thank you very much. And thank you for your good work on the subject.

Faith McDonnell is from the Institute on Religion and Democracy, and worked heroically on this topic. Thank you very much.

FAITH McDONNELL: Thank you, Mike.

I'm glad that these photos are here today, because it reminds me of decades and generations of southern Sudanese who suffered the same fate and worse. Remember that the genocide started in southern Sudan where two million or more have died.

And because the commission's report focuses on the CPA and on southern Sudan, that's what I'm focusing on today as well.

And I want to thank the commission for bringing this much needed attention to the ongoing problems of southern Sudan and the marginalized areas. This is a part of Sudan that suffered for so many years, and I commend the Sudan policy focus to you all. It's a wonderful resource. I hope that the U.S. government will use it as a resource and as good advice.

Your reporting is comprehensive and forthright, and indicates how urgent it is that the U.S. and other nations do all they can to support the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement, and the fledgling government of south Sudan.

There are several points that I'd like to emphasize based on confirmation and additional information from church leadership in southern Sudan that we have received through IRD friends and partners who have recently returned from the area.

In the report it says, U.S. leadership resolve and resources are needed to ensure that a stable and just peace is sustained in Sudan; that institutional development in the south brings stability and progress to that devastated region, and that Sudan's millions of refugees and IDPs can be assisted to return home in safety, or to resettle elsewhere.

It also says the commission recommends Sudan continue to be designated as a CPC, as we've heard. And I believe that this is a very important point. They go on to say that this should not preclude U.S. support for economic and political development in the south. That is a very important point. Southern Sudan should not continue to suffer for the transgressions of its own persecutors - and they are at this point.

A missionary from here in D.C. brings back word that church leaders in southern Sudan are worried over the lack of implementation, not to mention the violations of the CPC. Soldiers have not received any pay. Khartoum are still in Djouba when they were supposed to be moved out.

The south is not receiving its share of oil revenue. According to one bishop, people who will not leave Khartoum are being rounded up and killed.

In addition to the IDPs and other refugees, there are tens of thousands who have been enslaved who are still in the north, and they'll increase the need for more resources if and when they are allowed to return home.

The bishops have indicated that some women and children who were freed and returned to the south are trying to get back to the north on their own because they would rather be in slavery than starve to death.

Another mission delegation, this one from Midland, Texas, interviewed church leaders in Khartoum. Their statements also confirm the commission report. They say although the new constitution from the CPA has on paper improved religious freedom in Sudan, the culture here is still uneducated in and resisting these new freedoms.

And I would add that it may well be that the message that the people in the north are receiving from President Bashir may not exactly match the information that's in the CPA.

The report says, considering the poverty and lack of infrastructure in the south as well as the general devastation there and in the formerly contested areas, peace may well be unsustainable without development and security.

This is terrifying, and this is very - this enrages me, because for so long the people in the south have waited for peace. They've waited through bombings of -- (inaudible) - aircraft, they've waited through scorched earth policies against them. They've waited through persecution. And now that there is a chance we have to help them with this.

In conclusion, the people of southern Sudan and the marginalized areas have been incredibly resilient. They are our friends and allies in the war against terrorism, because they understand terrorism from the inside out. If the government of south Sudan is helped to prosper and flourish in this new area, they will not be a government that allows its citizens to be sentenced to death for changing their religion. They will be a government that upholds the very ideals of democracy and religious freedom for which we are fighting.

And I hope that we will assist them in this journey. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, Faith.

Colin Thomas-Jensen.

MR. THOMAS-JENSEN: Want to hear from me now?

MR. CROMARTIE: Sure.

MR. THOMAS-JENSEN: My name is Colin Thomas-Jensen from the International Crisis Group, which is a nonprofit research and advocacy organization. We do a lot of work on Sudan.

I want to thank the commission for - I took a glance through it - I think it's a great report. The recommendations I think we would fully endorse. And I think we're also calling for what Congressman Wolf called for, a special envoy. I think it's desperately needed, and something that everybody who has been working on Sudan should come together and rally around this.

There needs to be a focal point within the administration through which all Sudan policy goes.

Darfur is in the news, and it remains a catastrophe, a catastrophe that I think threatens to get much worse because of a converging crisis in eastern Chad. I think this situation needs to be looked at not as the spillover of conflict into Chad, but as the concurrent - concurrent crises in neighboring countries that are now coming together, and civilians are caught in the middle.

However as we watch in horror as civilians continue to suffer daily atrocities in western Sudan and eastern Chad, the greatest hope for eventual peace is Sudan is failing, and is failing off camera. That, of course, is what we've been talking about, and what this report I think appropriately calls attention to - the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

The Crisis Group, my organization, is finalizing a report this week that we hope will call attention to the failing implementation of the agreement.

And let me quickly, because I know we're running out of time, get a few of the significant but not insurmountable problems that we've identified through our research.

First and foremost are the actions of the National Congress Party, the ruling party in Khartoum, to deliberately, systematically undermine the agreement. The National Congress Party is weakening the ability of its partner, the SPLM, to be an effective partner in the National Unity government by stripping functions away from FPLN-led ministries. It's delaying progress in implementation of the agreement by slowing the formation of critical committees and mechanisms that were built into the agreement precisely to make sure that implementation went smoothly, and to guarantee genuine political reform in the country.

And perhaps the most troubling, the National Congress Party continues to destabilize southern Sudan, notably by continuing its support for the Lords Resistance Army, an Ugandan-based militia that has wrought havoc on civilians in the region for over 20 years, and is now seen to operate with impunity and much freedom inside southern Sudan.

Second, I think, a second problem, we have identified is the SPLM itself, the rebel movement that signed an agreement with the government. It really has yet to fully recover from the death of its leader, Tom Durang (ph), who died tragically in a helicopter crash last year.

And the SPLM we think is completely overwhelmed with - you've got a Herculean task of simultaneously serving as a partner in a unity government, and forming a new government of southern Sudan.

These first two, the ill will of the National Congress Party and the poor capacity of the SPLM, I think were grimly predictable when we went into this process. These were things that we anticipated. And they would only be counterbalanced, we could only counterbalance these obstacles with strong international engagement and support for implementation of the agreement.

Sadly, the failure thus far of the international community to support CPA implementation is the third problem that we've identified in our research, particularly the United States who has so much riding on this deal; played a lead role in reaching the deal; has shown itself incapable of delivering on the promises it made to deliver tangible peace dividends to southern Sudan; to



assist in building the capacity of the government of southern Sudan, and in reforming the southern army. I mean security sector reform is crucial.

And third, and perhaps most critically, in applying real pressure to the National Congress Party to hold up its end of the bargain. As the congressman said, we have yet to see, despite the continued actions in Darfur, any real punitive measures taken against anyone in the National Congress Party, many of whom have already been identified by a commission of experts that the United Nations sent out as responsible for war crimes in Darfur.

Unless these trends are quickly reversed, and I would include Darfur with them, we are very concerned that the peace agreement could collapse, taking with it the hopes of millions of Sudanese for whom this represents the best chance to break free from a cycle of brutality that has characterized Sudan for some 50 years.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you, Colin.

We're almost out of time, but we want to entertain your questions. We thank you for waiting.

We'd now like to open it up for your questions.

Q: Do you have a reaction to the Arab League's acceptance, apparently, to the NCP's position - (inaudible) - that there should not be a U.N. peacekeeping force - apparently to - (inaudible) - to provide funds for non-United Nations - (inaudible)?

MR. CROMARTIE: Do we have a reaction to that? Let's see if any of my fellow commissioners have a reaction to that.

MS. :

The commission wants to see the United Nations force extended; a Chapter 7 resolution adopted; and protection provided.

MR. CROMARTIE: There you go. Thank you.

Others? We were so thorough that you didn't have any questions.  
Yes, sir. I see you. Yes, sir.

Q: (Unintelligible.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you.

Q: (Unintelligible.)

MR. CROMARTIE: Commissioner Gaer, and then we do have to give up the room, apparently.

MS. GAER: You will see in the policy brief that the commission has an explicit position on the issue of sanctions, and that position is that the sanctions should not be lifted until the religious freedom is secured, and the CPA is fully implemented in the country, and other abuses stop. It's very clear there.

The issue of sanctions is one that divides many people, but it's been rather focused in the case of Sudan, and the commission has been very explicit and outspoken on this for many years, since its founding.

MR. CROMARTIE: Bishop.

BISHOP RAMIREZ: Yeah, sanctions are one of those tricky things, and one of the few things that our government, any government, can use against another government to provide pressure, to provide democracy or human rights protections or whatever.

On the question of giving permission to churches, we only echo what we heard, and we heard it more than once. What the churches have done -- for example, Catholic churches, they have built with permission I presume some sports facilities, gymnasiums and other social services buildings. So they have had - and sometimes they use those for services. But as far as the church buildings are concerned, we heard what we - we reported what we heard.

Thank you.

MR. CROMARTIE: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming. We have to give up the room now; we've gone overtime.

We're grateful for your coming, and we'd like for you to feel free to take copies of the report. Again, they're right outside the room here.

(END)